**From Kim Marshall’s Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation**

**Reasons Why the Traditional Model of Supervision and Evaluation Does Not Improve Student Learning**

Conventional supervision is defined as observing and coaching teachers during the year while evaluation consists of a summative assessment toward the end of the school year, usually for teachers’ personnel files. Consider the following examples from real life:

• A principal boasts he spends two hours visiting all 17 of his teachers’ classrooms daily and he does. However, when teachers are asked about the feedback they get, they say the principal doesn’t talk to them about what he sees.

• A principal receives a complaint about a history teacher’s discipline problems. She is overwhelmed and rarely observes. When she conducts her formal observation, the teacher’s students are well behaved and the principal must give the teacher a satisfactory rating.

• A principal spends four entire weekends in the spring writing up evaluations. He puts them in teachers’ mailboxes asking if anyone wants to talk before the deadline. The teachers sign the evaluations but no one responds and there is no discussion.

• A teacher has good classroom management and is well liked, but her students perform poorly on standardized tests. When the principal brings up the scores, the teacher complains about getting the “bad class” and the union representative reminds the principal that a teacher’s evaluation may not mention test results.

These troubling examples are representative of some of the key ways that supervision and evaluation fall short. Below are reasons that supervision and evaluation have not been a powerful force in improving instruction:

1. The principal sees a minuscule fraction of actual teaching time. Given that a teacher has about five classes a day for 180 days, and a principal thoroughly evaluates only one of those 900 classes, this means the principal evaluates only about 0.1 percent of a teacher’s instruction for the year!

2. Teachers often put on a dog and pony show. Teachers put on their best clothes and showcase their best lessons. This is not a snapshot of a teacher’s typical teaching. Preannounced visits are useless. Imagine a restaurant being given a warning that the Board of Health was coming for a visit.

3. The principal’s presence changes classroom dynamics. If principals don’t visit often, students will sit up straighter and behave better, again, making it impossible to observe a typical class.

4. A principal can miss the bigger picture in a write up. Some districts require that principals provide detailed narratives when they observe. Writing frantically makes it easy to miss the big picture because it is difficult to walk around, observe students working, and examine the learning. Furthermore, these detailed write ups of a single lesson do not address big picture questions such as: What unit is this a part of? How does this align with state standards? How will students be assessed? Unit plans reveal a lot more than individual lesson plans.

Many evaluation forms are cumbersome and legalistic, making it difficult to give effective feedback. Detailed checklists are often simplistic and miss important components of teaching and learning. The district’s goal is to provide a document that is arbitration proof. These documents do not lead to authentic discussions between principals and teachers.

6. Critical evaluations can shut down adult learning or be shrugged off. Teachers often react defensively to criticism. They have fears and feel demeaned. Further, the process goes against what we know about how adults learn. The feedback is one

way and the principal owns it, not the teachers. This leads teachers to reject the feedback.

7. Some principals don’t confront bad or mediocre teaching. Leaders often feel the need to be liked or at least keep the peace. This prevents them from confronting inadequate teaching. Furthermore, it takes great skill to give feedback in a

way that the teacher will hear it.

8. Many principals are too harried to do effective evaluations. Day-to-day operational responsibilities are often so great that principals do not have the energy or time to write effective evaluations.

9. The focus of evaluation is on pleasing the principal, not student learning. For teachers, the goal of an evaluation is to get a “good grade.” Authentic conversations about whether students are learning rarely occur and it is even rarer to discuss student results. If anything, the focus is on the process of teaching, not the results.

These troubling examples support the idea that we need to drastically rethink the way we conduct supervision and evaluation. Instead we need a new approach in which principals and teachers work together to improve teacher practice so it results in improved student achievement.